

Testimony of

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Representing Local Fire/HazMat and Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

House Homeland Security Committee:
“Emergency Planning and Preparedness:
Federal State and Local Coordination”

Wednesday, April 12, 2006
Orting, Washington

Welcome, I'm A.D. Vickery, Assistant Chief of the Seattle Fire Department. I entered the Fire Service in 1966 and, over the past 40 years, have responded to thousands of emergencies. I responded to the Oklahoma City Bombing, the 9/11 Terrorist Attack on New York City, and Hurricanes as a member of our FEMA sponsored Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Team. As head of the Seattle Fire Investigation Unit I completed basic Law Enforcement training and held a Police commission. I've worked as a firefighter/paramedic for 12 years in Seattle.

Preparedness and response to emergencies must build on local capability. The emphasis in government needs to focus on funding and supporting local capability.

I would like to address areas where significant progress is being made, and then areas where enhancements are needed related to local fire, hazmat, and field emergency medical services.

Areas of Significant Progress

- Never in my 40 years of service have I seen this high a level of cooperation and mutual respect exist between the Fire Service and Law Enforcement. Terrorism has taught us that we are mutually dependent. This realization has allowed us to integrate resources and command structures, reduce duplication of effort and standardize equipment.
- Emergency responders now have a common "language" and game plan which integrates local, state, federal and military resources. The common language is the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Previously, when the Sheriff points and yells "fire" it didn't mean the same thing as the Fire Chief yelling "fire". NIMS provides the baseline for emergency response operations and communication.

The National Response Plan (NRP) provides the structure for how local, state, federal and military assets interact and support each other. We all have to read it and remember it.

- Risk based funding. All of America is at risk, from nature and terrorists. Certain areas are at a higher risk. I don't purport to know what a terrorist is going to do next, but I do know what they have done. They kill people, and they kill people in large numbers.
- A new Director for FEMA. We need to fully support the confirmation of Chief David Paulison as the new Director of FEMA! Chief Paulison has over 30 years of response experience. Let's let him use it.

- The focus on terrorism response is not at counter purposes to responding to natural disasters. If you can respond to a terrorist incident, you can respond to a natural disaster. I do believe that there is such a thing as the “perfect storm,” I’ve never seen a “perfect response”. We do, however, need to balance our exercises and training to include natural disasters as a component of our overall preparedness.

Areas which Need Enhancement

- Communications continue to hamper our ability to respond effectively and efficiently. We need hardware and redundant systems. In Seattle, the Fire Department has 1,000 members but we only have 600 radios. In a disaster, 400 of our firefighters will not have radios.

There continues to be significant gaps in police, fire, EMS and Emergency Management communication interoperability. The United States military utilizes satellites for ground communications, why can’t the government put up communication satellites for Public Safety? We get satellite TV all over the United States, why not provide redundancy for first responders using similar technology?

- People are our most valuable asset. We need to provide federal staffing support for local fire and law enforcement agencies. In Seattle we have approximately 350 police and firefighters on-duty for a daytime population of 1 million people compressed into 90 square miles. We simply do not have adequate staffing to deal with emergencies out of the ordinary.
- We need to significantly increase funding to improve Port security and response. Our major ports are critical assets and there aren’t a lot of them, and they are soft targets. Unlike many major ports, the Cities of Seattle and Tacoma surround their ports. This puts residents at risk. We need to fund prevention, response and recovery planning and resources.
- As a responder, when a disaster occurs, I need equipment to continue the response when my local supplies are consumed. We need to fully fund the Prepositioned Equipment Packages which were recently utilized in Hurricane Katrina to reconstitute local public safety agencies. This program has been transferred to FEMA without adequate funding. It absolutely needs to be supported.
- Fully fund FEMA and populate the agency with professional responders. Without adequate funding it doesn’t matter who FEMA reports to.

- Increase funding to high risk cities and urban areas. Both natural disasters and terrorists will likely kill and injure more people in densely populated areas.
- Improve our ability to respond to multiple casualty incidents. We have a local capacity to deal with dozens of injured victims, we need the capacity to deal with hundreds. It doesn't currently exist. We need mass casualty field surge capability.
- We need to provide the public with a continuing stream of factual information which will allow them to be self-sufficient for days instead of hours. Never underestimate the ability of the American public to weed out fact from fiction.

In summary, we are making progress in our efforts to improve Homeland Security for prevention, response and recovery from natural and manmade disasters. Success will depend on commitment and a combination of local resources and sustained federal supplemental funding.

Thank you.